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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 JAKARTA 000578

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR EAP, EAP/MTS, EAP/MLS, EAP/RSP, DRL; NSC FOR
E.PHU

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINS](#) [PREL](#) [ID](#)

SUBJECT: ACEH -- POLICE ACTION AND DIPLOMATIC OBSERVERS
LOWER ELECTION FEVER

REF: A. JAKARTA 459

[1](#)B. JAKARTA 392

[1](#)C. JAKARTA 337 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: DCM John A. Heffern, reasons 1.4(b+d).

[1](#)1. (U) This message coordinated with Consulate Medan.

[1](#)2. (C) SUMMARY: Mission has increased its profile in Aceh Province in recent weeks, thus clearly expressing our support for fair and peaceful legislative elections on April 9. The Ambassador has visited twice since February alone. Our diplomats have repeatedly visited election hotspots across the province since mid-March. In addition, two teams of roving USG-funded Carter Center international observers are in the province. Political-related harassment and violence continues to simmer but police are cracking down on troublemakers, instilling increased confidence in the GOI's commitment to free and fair elections in the region. END SUMMARY.

SPECIAL FOCUS: ACEH

[1](#)3. (C) One key focus area for the U.S. is Aceh during this election timeframe in Indonesia, (Note: National legislative elections take place on April 9; presidential elections take place in July.) Simmering tensions between former members of the Free Aceh Movement (GAM) and anti-separatist militias and some GOI officials--combined with the stress of a high stake political campaign--have many Achenese on edge. Adding to the pressure is the fact that in Aceh, unlike the rest of country, six local parties are also competing for legislative seats at the district and provincial levels, in addition to the 38 national parties. (Note: Per the 2005 Helsinki peace accord, the GOI allowed locally registered political parties.)

[1](#)4. (C) Among the local parties, the ex-GAM Aceh Party (PA) dominates in most parts of the province. Some elements of the GOI suspect that PA harbors separatist ambitions in violation of the peace accord. Dozens of mostly political-related incidents occurred from December through March, a level not seen since the peace agreement was signed. These incidents included grenade explosions, arson, and other attacks against political parties, ex-militia organizations and security forces.

HEIGHTENED DIPLOMATIC PRESENCE IN A VOLATILE REGION

[1](#)5. (C) Ambassador Hume has visited Aceh twice in 2009 alone, and six times in the past two years. In early February, he discussed security and elections issues with Governor Irwandi, at which time the Governor requested U.S. election

observers and asked the Ambassador to raise the security concerns with President Yudhoyono, which the Ambassador did soon after that meeting (per Ref C). The Ambassador returned to Aceh in early March, touching on these same issues with Governor Irwandi again. He also met with the new Aceh provincial Police Chief Adityawarman to convey our concerns about the peace process and to describe the Mission's plans to send additional personnel to Aceh in the run up to the legislative elections (Ref A). Adityawarman pledged his full support for our election observation efforts, and has held true to that promise.

16. (C) In the past several weeks, U.S. diplomats have traveled the entire province, making repeated visits to the more volatile areas. At every location, we have met with police chiefs, local elections officials, political leaders, party leaders, ex-GAM leaders, ex-militia leaders, journalists, civil society, and ordinary citizens. Our purpose has been twofold: to observe the election temperature and to deliver messages for everyone to remain calm. In addition, two teams of USG-funded Carter Center observers are traveling to key areas, with a third team to arrive closer to elections. To date, the U.S. has mounted the only significant such effort in Aceh, although we are coordinating with other Missions which will send diplomats during election week.

17. (C) In our meetings with PA and ex-GAM, we have delivered a clear message that the USG wants PA to operate within the MOU and reemphasize its commitment to national unity. We emphasized that the USG will not support separatism, and that provocative campaigning which promotes a separatist agenda

JAKARTA 00000578 002 OF 003

poses a danger to peace by antagonizing the GOI and former militias. Finally, we also urged PA and ex-GAM to not retaliate against violence and intimidation, but rather to take a deep breath, allow the GOI to enforce the laws, and to trust the international community to closely observe. If the peace is broken, it would take time to recover, we emphasized.

18. (C) For the most part, PA leaders assured us that they are not promoting separatism, although some of the more militant leaders suggested this is still their ultimate goal. PA is strong along the east and west coasts, particularly in areas dominated by ethnic Acehnese. PA is expected to poll strongly in these areas. Other political parties in PA strongholds, including the other local Acehnese parties, complain of PA intimidation. PA has threatened other party leaders and falsely implied in campaign literature that PA is the only party which was part of the Helsinki MOU. PA has widely violated pacts to limit the size of campaign parades. PA also is suspected of being behind some of the political violence.

19. (C) In meetings with government officials and former militia, we conveyed concern that rising political violence threatens peace. Along the west coast, the distrust and animosity that government officials harbor towards the powerful PA was palpable in most meetings. PA was generally blamed for the political violence. In other areas, particularly in Central Aceh District, ground zero in the conflict between ex-GAM and former militia members, the police chief and local officials worry more about violent acts fomented by former militias and security forces rather than PA, which is in a vulnerable position.

10. (C) Former militias and elements of the Indonesian army (TNI) are suspected to be behind some attacks on PA, including grenade attacks, arson, intimidation of PA supporters and destruction of PA banners. In our meetings, police and GOI officials confirmed that they believe there are strong links between the military and militias.

CENTRAL HIGHLANDS: GROUND ZERO

¶11. (C) The Central Highlands region is a tinderbox for potential conflict. Politics in this area has traditionally been dominated by the Gayo and Javanese ethnic groups, which distinguish themselves from the littoral Achenese. Gayo leaders advocate the creation of separate provinces in the interior which would diminish the power of ex-GAM Acehnese. For the most part, these groups resent the warfare and economic destruction which the GAM movement brought to the highlands. The highland also has not benefited from massive flows of tsunami assistance. Further, former GAM and militia elites have snatched the post-conflict assistance, with little benefit trickling down to the rank-and-file, leading to general unease. Ex-militia leaders are pouring gasoline on the situation by circulating anti-PA propaganda, warning Gayo and Javanese that PA wants to push them out of the province.

¶12. (C) However, several steps by the GOI in recent weeks have reduced the election fever. Everyone we spoke with said a speech in Aceh by President Yudhoyono, cautioning all sides to keep the peace, helped greatly. In addition, both sides of the conflict said the new provincial police chief assigned to Aceh six weeks ago has begun to bring about law and order. A number of people keeping arms have been arrested, military personnel who took down PA banners in one city were dismissed following a police investigation, and PA has been disciplined for its actions by elections authorities. Also promising, two suspects in recent grenade attacks were arrested by national police and are being held in Jakarta. The suspects are possibly TNI, one reliable civilian source told us, sourcing a senior police contact.

USG PRESENCE APPRECIATED

¶13. (C) Some GOI officials and members of security forces have been wary of the USG diplomatic presence in Aceh. Officials, reportedly intelligence agents, have tailed us, occasionally questioning our intentions and disrupting our meetings. However, the GOI mostly has been supportive and police have allowed us to roam freely. Our effort was in large part at the bequest of Governor Irwandy in a meeting with the Ambassador. Former Finnish president Martti

JAKARTA 00000578 003 OF 003

Ahtisaari also requested international observers when he met the Ambassador in February. Civil society said our presence has helped keep the province calm while local leaders said the effort made them feel more secure and less likely to retaliate. Our heightened presence in Aceh will continue until late April.

HUME